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Shock

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Shock

Mallory Hellman

Ahmed's hands couldn't stop shaking as he stirred a sugar cube into his steaming cup of coffee. Trying to remain inconspicuous in the booth of the Geneva Café, he sank lower into his seat and closed his eyes, trying to compose himself. Should he contact the authorities? Should he report his adventure? No, no...Ahmed shook his head vehemently and nervously sipped from the ceramic mug in front of him.

"Anything else I can get for you, sir?" The waiter was suddenly hovering over him, smiling as pleasantly as possible under the burden of a platter of half-eaten pastries.

"N-n-no...thank you," Ahmed managed to stutter, wishing the server would leave him alone.

"Okay then." The waiter was gone as quickly as he had arrived, but Ahmed had noticed his judgmental stare. No, he could never contact the authorities. Not at a time like this. A Turkish Muslim living temporarily in Belgium, Ahmed realized that he would be at a major disadvantage if he informed the government now. They could call it an attempted suicide mission, or worse, a terrorist attack.

Suddenly, he just wanted to run. Ahmed wanted more than anything to break free of the shackles so oppressively chaining him, just to explode and run away...but he had done that before...and where did it get him?

Ahmed added cream to his coffee, slowly reflecting and calming down. Three days ago, his life had been normal; he was just a man making a living like any other. Granted, the September 11 terrorist attacks had made him a target of a bit of stereotype, but it was nothing he couldn't handle. He worked for a trucking company that transported bread and assorted baked goods across Western Europe. The salary was decent, and, until Ahmed learned French fluently, it was one of the only jobs he could attain. The whole thing seemed so surreal...

He remembered his supervisor's words ringing in his ears.

"Ahmed, these goods need to reach Airolo by October 30. Take the Gotthard tunnel through the mountains. If you want to make the trip faster, drive through the night; I'll give you a nice bonus for your promptness."

So he set off, sitting in the familiar leather seat equipped with wooden massage beads against the back, listening to jazz on the radio.

"What a lovely trip!" Ahmed had thought to himself. "I've always wanted to see the Swiss countryside, and I hear that the Gotthard is the longest tunnel in the Alps."

After purchasing some fast food for dinner, Ahmed began to feel sluggish as he drove. At about eleven o'clock, he realized that he was probably too drowsy to continue and that he should find a place to stay for the night, but the idea of impressing his supervisor with a speedy delivery overcame this feeling.

As he approached the tunnel, Ahmed's eyelids became increasingly heavy. The darkness and claustrophobia of the tunnel found Ahmed struggling to stay awake. Smoothly, the saxophone crooned from the radio, sending Ahmed into a state of torpor. He began to feel quite pleasant, a little lightheaded, enjoying the music as his eyes closed slowly, slowly...

BAM!!!!!!

Ahmed's world was spinning. His truck rolled once, twice, colliding with two other vehicles and finally smashing into the tunnel's wall. Suddenly, he was awake, alert, and ready for action. Hearing crash after deafening crash, Ahmed was sure that at least twenty more vehicles were becoming involved in this disaster.

Breaking himself free of the rubble that once had been the bakery truck, Ahmed leaned against the tunnel's wall, panting from the excruciating pain in his legs and throbbing head. He realized that he was bleeding from his forehead and had lost most of the feeling in his left arm, but he didn't have much time to contemplate his injuries before a car on the other side of the debris exploded. Knowing it was only a matter of time before his truck and the other cars combusted as well, Ahmed felt the adrenaline pumping throughout his body. In a wild rage he dashed for miles and miles and abruptly...the tunnel ended.

Tossing his mangled body into the grass, Ahmed lay down and contemplated his next move. He wanted to get to civilization; he wanted to be some place where he could clean

himself up and start over. He would hitchhike to Geneva.

The back of the car smelled like stale cigarettes. Ahmed coughed as he sputtered out a tale of being evicted from his home and abused after the September 11 tragedy. He would use this story to get sympathy and perhaps a little money to survive, he thought. It worked. The man who drove Ahmed to Geneva also provided him with clean clothes and money for food.

So here he sat in the café, finished with his coffee, pondering the experience. How many people had died in the accident? How many days had they been searching for him? What would he do now? It didn't matter. Ahmed stepped cautiously into the brisk Geneva air, looked toward the sky, and continued on his way.